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ABSTRACT

Future trends in the field of special education are considered from the special educator's point of view. Predictions for education beyond 1984 include that schools will increase their capacities or modify their operational procedures so that educational services will be provided for all children, that parents will receive a semiannual set of instructional objectives for each of their children, and that elderly and retired persons will substantially supplement the efforts of regular school personnel. (SBH)

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WORLD CONGRESS

ON FUTURE SPECIAL EDUCATION

PLANNING THE FUTURE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION: OUR DUTY, OUR RESPONSIBILITY, AND OUR PRIVILEGE

by

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The central theme of this conference confronts us with a challenge: the ability to reconcile our understanding of a world that appears to be entertaining a series of impending revolutions, and at the same time to be able to imagine alternatives for tomorrow.

Mores, values, technology are changing our way of life and our mode of looking at things. Modern life is changing fast and Special Education is changing more switftly than many other fields.

Under conditions of high speed change, a professional group without the ability to anticipate the future condemns itself to stagnation.

The future must neither be ignored, nor captured by an elite. We acknowledge our gratitude to the Council for Exceptional Children for providing a way to bring us together from so different parts of the world, not to predict what a future or the future will be, but to explore in conjectural form various future states which remain open to change, as a resultant of our individual and collective actions, accessible to human choice. Thus the emphasis is nondeterministic.

In many senses, there are no experts on the future, we are all fellow travelers with varying degrees of insight, awareness and knowledge of the vast array of factors which influence our individual and collective life.

In terms of the future of Special Education the speakers in the programme will hasten the cross-cultural transmission of contemporary research - and practices, and will stimulate a fruitful dialogue with the audience. Each one of us will have as much claim to substantial projection of that future as anyone else. This is our duty and our privilege.

The changes in child population relative to ability range, complexity

of deviation and educational needs dictate continuing evaluation, alteration of referents, and redefinition of effectiveness. They dictate also need for continuing self-appraisal, self-renewal and confrontation of the real and the ideal.

Our present and future strength clearly rests on the education of all, the best education our society can provide -to the slow-learning child as well as the fast-learning child, to the hearing child and the deaf, to the seeing child and the blind, to the emotionally stable child and the emotionally unstable, to the child who can easily communicate and the child who has not developed the skills of communication.

Clearly, special education is not an institution to be maintained with minimum effort. Each of us is wielding an influence on its direction of change. Granted, this is a call to accept responsibility, but in addition, it is a call to a field's leadership in cutting new pathways for exceptional children - and further, to effect world change in their behalf.

We must keep in our minds that implicit within any consideration of change in relation to Special Education is the idea that our conventional notions of normalcy, of human competency and of human nature itself are also open to change and considerable modifications.

That is, we must begin with a sense of change potential in the most critical of all variables, man himself.

1. It suggests, for example, that the conventional ideal of personality development, i.e., as "normal" and "healthy", may be open to question--that, indeed, personality and identity with their associated attributes of stability, levels of competence, etc., are not fixed,

but are a shifting profile of attributes which change over the life cycle, as an essentially unfinished nature. The potential for change, except in severe instances of biomedically defined dysfunction, remains relatively open.

2. It may also alert us to the problem of the ways in which we and our societies may project our attitudes and values onto the handicapped persons--in ways that satisfy <u>our</u> needs and desires, but which may be both inappropriate and dysfunctional to <u>their</u> needs and desires. For example, though we may approve of therapy "for them" geared towards the training of "normal-seeming" behavior, this may obscure the more important need for the general socialization and education of all persons towards greater tolerance of wider ranges of acceptable behavior. Within general education in human rights and individual freedom, we must also include, "The Right to be Different."

Cultures and societies have been complex and ill structured for thousands of years, however until recent times the relatively small population and slow pace of technology allowed learning to be experienced by over many generations. The social systems were stable for long periods and the impact of technology was limited.

Given the many social and technological changes of the past decade, there are indeed exciting developments, and some of these may influence special education. Harmon (Rubin, 1975) tells us for example that we now have or will soon have the power:

"Through human engineering, to modify indefinitely the bodies of selected individuals, for reasons ranging from scientific curiosity to prolonging life.

Through genetic engineering, to modify the characteristics of the human race and to shape the course of evolution; and. . .

To alter to unlimited extent men's mental and emotional characteristics including intellectual abilities, motivations, affect, personalities, and character. . ."
(Rubin, pp. 24-25.)

There are many other provocative projections. One reads, for example, of imaginative uses of technology in the service of education, of plastic substitutes for human organs, and a variety of techniques for manipulating conception, fertility, and death.

There is considerable futuristic thinking in education as well (Anastasio, 1974; Bundy, 1976; Galtung, 1975; 'Gores, 1975; and Rubin, 1975) and it is not surprising that special educators have turned their attention to future matters.

The most comprehensive discussion of special education futures is the investigation by Schipper and Kenowitz (1976), USA. Using the Delphi technique, these researchers asked 121 school administrations to respond to 60 special education future events and to record the value which they attached to the events. Among the more interesting results, respondents predicted that between 1980 and 1995 (the dates are all predicted median year of

occurrence) due process procedures will be guaranteed and that all exceptional children will be receiving educational services. Among administrative trends, more extended and comprehensive administrative alternatives were predicted. The administrators also predicted that the severely handicapped will increasingly become recipients of educational benefits, that there will be increased progress towards deinstitutionalization, and that there will be an expansion of parental input into school matters.

Among instructional trends in the next 25 years, the administrators see expanded uses of technology and instructional media services to reduce or remediate particular handicapping conditions. However, acceptance and implementation of the "mainstreaming" concept, as well as more extensive use of individualized/prescriptive instruction, were predicted to be in effect by 1985.

There was also the prediction that shifts would occur in the pre-service and in-service training of teachers.

Vast improvements in educational programs for the handicapped are just around the corner. The primary ingredients of this improvement are landmark legal decisions; active citizens groups that insist upon equal education; technological improvements in planning, teaching, and evaluating progress; and resources for integrating the handicapped child into the life of the community.

A number of successful pilot programs featuring individualized instruction, designed learning environments, and cooperative educational arrangements have proved to be successful. Improvements in technology for teaching and training so that there is better educational programs and training

sequences for teaching the teachers to be competent with all levels of childhood instruction. Finally, educational programs are built upon a more enlightened policy of community involvement so that support programs for the handicapped aid the schools in developing open systems of education that extend beyond the physical confines of the school and utilize the parents, the handicapped itself, citizen groups, and community agencies and settings. We seem at last to have a strong foundation for long-term growth in appropriate educational programs for handicapped citizens.

Educational technology has made impressive advances even though its designs are not supported by, nor incorporated in, a science of instruction. Consequently, the advances in educational technology are characterized by improving techniques for collecting data and disseminating information, for systems planning, for information processing and for behavioral management.

The optimistic view is that our gains are rapidly moving us into feasible designs for individualized instruction, programs for teaching language, computer assisted instructional systems, home-based instructional packages, and a common technology for the use of all relevant educational team members. How far our current technological explosion will take us, however, may depend on extrinsic factors. The intent of society in support of the schools may be to delay rapid developments in support of mainstreaming of handicapped children. The cost and the exponential need of the schools for new programs in support of all children. The actual progress then may not be measured by the state of the science or the art, but by the willingness of society to invest in this feature of its ethical and moral commitment.

We believe that we are headed in the right direction and we have every reason to believe that most, if not all, the grand aspirations we have for education can come to pass. The challenge is to produce a science of instruction that will make the best use of all the advance of technology, economic and intellectual resources for the good of all the children in the world.

In an increasingly interdependent world no one can escape the realities that still shock us.

The media have become all-embracing and expose us almost daily to both the potential new successes of health and educational technology and to some of our most abysmal failures in the developing and in the industrial worlds. Death rates, at least in infants and children, are decreasing, and the health industry gives the impression that the major secrets of disease are known and all that is required to solve the worst troubles is money and application.

With this aura around us, it is devastating to realize that there are an estimated 300 to 400 million disabled people in the world, and that one out of every 10 of the world's population may be disabled at any one time. The best guesses that we have available indicate that this number and proportion is increasing and may continue to increase in the future. (W.H.O. 1976.)

But even astronomical numbers may not shock us enough, especially when they are coupled to such a "polite" word as "disability."

The problem is part of an ecosystem that touches us all. <u>To be aware of it commits us to action</u>.

The optimism with which developing and developed countries alike faced the problems of economic and social development at the beginning of the

first United Nations Development Decade has long since disappeared. For some, this optimism has been replaced by pessimism (see, for example, Berger, 1976). For others it has been replaced by caution, and a realization that the problems impeding national development cannot be solved solely by raising Gross National Product or increasing economic productivity. For even in countries where this has occurred, there had often been no substantial reduction of poverty for the great majority of the population (see Sewell, 1977, Annex A; World Bank, 1975).

Increasingly, too, planners and policy makers are coming to view actions aimed directly at the social manifestations of poverty--malnutrition, disease and infection, educational wastage through failure to enroll, repetition, and dropping out, lack of general social services--as investment in future economic development, and as a foundation for gains in the present. In other words, reduction of poverty and its manifestations is <u>investment</u> in the future of a society, not simply social welfare for the disenfranchised (Haq, 1974; Selowsky & Taylor, 1973; Singer, 1972).

Two groups among the estimated one billion people continuing to live in severe or absolute poverty (Sewell, 1977, p. 156) in the developing countries <u>remain least affected by development efforts of the sixties and early seventies. These are women, particularly mothers, young children and the handicapped</u> (U.N., 1971, 1975b). They have either been excluded or marginally included in national development plans (Singer, 1972). The young child and the handicapped, particularly, has been by-passed by those allocating scarce resources and planning for the future.

Yet policy makers in some countries are beginning to view the failure to meet basic developmental needs of young children and handicapped people, as a potential obstacle to national development, and are mobilizing and reorganizing resources on behalf of them.

What are the priorities where children are concerned? Indeed, what rights do children have anyway? The UN General Assembly in November 1959 adopted the Declaration of the Rights of the Child, in recognition of the need for special safeguards, including legal protection, for children, by reason of their physical and mental immaturity. The Declaration proclaims, among other things, the child's right to healthy growth and development, supported by special care and protection. It further includes adequate prenatal and postnatal care, as well as adequate nutrition, housing, recreation and medical services, with special treatment, education and care for the child who is physically, mentally or socially handicapped. The child should also be protected against neglect, cruelty and exploitation. ALL CHILDREN IN LESS DEVELOPED COUNTRIES FALL INTO THE CATEGORY OF THOSE REQUIRING "SPECIAL TREATMENT". (Lorenzo, E.; 1975)

Children are of prime and critical importance because they are the wealth and future of every country. Hans Singer has suggested that perhaps the most crucial decision that a country has to make is the decision regarding the allocation of resources between the present generation of producers and the future, represented by its children.

> "The more a country is willing and able to spare resources for child development, sufficient to give each individual child a better preparation for life, the higher its chances of achieving

a decisive break-away from the vicious circle of poverty and economic stagnation" (Singer, 1972).

An effort will be made to obtain the cross disciplinary collaboration and the need to make the best use of those resources that are available. There is a gap between the available knowledge in the developing countries and the possibility of its effective implementation in the actual conditions of the less developed countries.

Available technology enables us to define issues and to solve certain difficult agreed upon problems, design interventions or instructional programs that can be initiated and refined through relevant data, construct functional learning environments that are adjusted to fit children individually and collectively, manage groups of heterogeneous children so that individual designs for learning are maintained over time and to handle and disseminate information so that others can have access to the designed and prescriptive successes of others.

This inequality of situations will be recognized by those who live in abundance and development and by those who must act amidst limitations and scarcity. But no matter where the educator is, the dreams are the same, and with this universal aspiration of progress in mind and as further extension of our optimistic stands, as an exercise in futurism inspired by the work of Schiefelbusch and Hoyt we will project a view of the education scene that might exist beyond 1984:

a) "Special education is now on the brink of realizing or fulfilling the many goals society had for the handicapped when the normalization, the institutionalization, and

mainstreaming concepts first became a part of the educational establishment.

b) Schools have increased their capacities or modified their operational procedures so that educational services are provided for all children, not just for the children who are easiest to teach and quickest to learn.

c) Parents receive a semiannual set of instructional objectives for each of their children. These objectives are subject to the approval of the parents, and the parents receive monthly reports that specify in measurable terms the progress of each child toward achieving the objectives.

d) Referrals to special environments are now rare. The regular teachers, school psychologists, principals, and other school personnel have all received extensive training in ways to help children with special needs survive in mainstream settings.

e) Elderly and retired persons substantially supplement the efforts of regular school personnel. They put their years of experience and career training to work by providing regular, but part-time, instruction in the mainstream process. They are paid as part-time teachers and are accountable for the progress of their students in the same manner as the regular teachers.

f) Children are matched to programming according to their aptitudes. Each child has an individualized education program plan that involves a range of academic and life skills. They acquire these skills at different rates, and they are not given stigmatizing labels if they do not progress at a certain predetermined pace. The only label the children have are those their parents give them--their names.

g) Children stay in school now as long as it takes them to learn what they need to know.

h) Reinforcement and reinforcers are individually determined and are built into each child's program to motivate the child to learn as much as he or she is able to learn.

i) Any time after they are fifteen years old they may leave school and go to work for themselves or for someone else. But they are still free to take advantage of the educational system whenever they want and for whatever purpose.

j) There is no longer any isolated "special" education. All education is special, and each student may pursue whatever course of learning he or she desires for as long as he or she wants to pursue it.

k) A critical aspect of the educational system now is the participation of parents. Parents are teachers at home, and a significant portion of each child's education is dependent upon the guidance the child receives at home.

1) This system is much more dependent upon collaboration than were the old systems. Since the educational process these days is a continuing process and not a segmented series of different institutions, there are direct ties between the early education processes and what were formerly called institutions of higher education. In the old terms, we would probably say that the preschool is linked to the graduate school. They are just at different points on the road.

m) The heart of the educational system is a computer controlled educational satellite technology that provides a dissemination and utilization system to bring coherence and direction to a very complex set of activities, diagnosis, assessment, teaching evaluation and guidance".

This vision based upon actual facts, challenge and commit us to seek feasible and creative strategies and to put them into practice. We must believe that ways and means can and will be found "beyond 1984" to educate all our children optimally.

We do not apologize for the state of Special Education in 1978 but we acknowledge fully that the next ten years will be both rewarding and difficult. Educators are now challenged to meet the aspirations of society, adjusting to the changing relations of special and regular education without a real and existing science of instruction.

If anything else I want with this presentation is to share with you is this concern. I deeply believe that we are the main resource for action. We must stop looking solely for outside help and we must strengthen the faith in our capacity to fulfill our destiny as professionals and individuals.

On departing let me put my goodbye in Maimonides' words: "Dear Lord, You have entrusted me the life and death of your creatures and here I am to do my duty".

This is our privilege, our responsibility and may add our Joy!

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